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MELVILLE AND BATHURST ISLANDERS: A SHORT DESCRIPTION

By W. E. HARNEY and A. P. ELKIN[1]

133 *Type of Country.* These islands are fairly large, measuring together about 150 miles from east to west and about 50 miles across the widest part. It is flat country composed of lateritic overburden covering a chalky and, in some places, a green stone full of fossils (Ammonites, Belemites, etc.). At one time it was probably connected with the mainland, and the Apsley Strait which separates the two islands was in those days a continuation of the Adelaide River.

137 The timber is mostly stringybark, bloodwood, and fan palm, while along the shores is the usual jungle growth that can be found in these parts. Wallabies and 136 other game are also present, but no porcupine (echidna), native cat or emu. Dingoes 231 are plentiful. This is the reason for the natives having few dogs. The tame dog 825 (*wongine*), while out hunting alone, is often destroyed by these dingoes, *diamini*. According to the natives, the dingoes do this because they are annoyed with the native dogs for taking some of their food. They (the *diamini*) are the rightful owners and the dog is an intruder.

142 *The Natives.* The natives of these islands, all of whom speak one language, are an unusual type. Curly hair predominates, but occasionally we find a straight-304 haired and a curly haired person in the same family. The cicatrices on their bodies are of the palm leaf pattern, though the straight lines of the mainland people may 757 often be seen. They bear numerous small cuts on their foreheads and various parts of the body, caused by the practice of blood-letting as a cure for sickness.

101 *Tribal Name.* The tribal name of these people is an open question. At one time Mr. Harney called them Nimara, their word for language or talk. They have a word, Tunawini, one black man, but this term can embrace people of other tribes; it comes from the words *tiwi*, men (Hart's name for these natives, *Oceania*, Vol. I, No. 2, p. 167), *tini*, man, *tiya*, woman. They have, however, a term Worunguwe, which embraces them all—clans, horde places, people—and excludes other tribes such as Iwaidja, Larrakia, etc. The Iwaidja people call the Melville Island natives by that name, and Mr. Harney suggests that we should use it. Hart's term is not really a tribal name for it simply means people. Father McGrath suggests a name

[114] [1] Mr. W. E. Harney is the exceptional layman who understands Aboriginal culture. For a number of years he and I have been collaborating in the study of a number of Aboriginal tribes of the Northern Territory. This article is a brief summary of information gathered by Mr. Harney while engaged in work on Melville and Bathurst Islands. It has been checked, discussed with Mr. Harney, and rewritten by myself. For some parts of this paper readers are advised to refer to the following articles by C. W. M. Hart: "The Tiwi of Melville and Bathurst Islands," *Oceania*, Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 167-180, and "Personal Names Amongst the Tiwi," *Oceania*, Vol. I, No. 3, pp. 80-90.—A. P. ELKIN.

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which is interesting. It means the "Moon People" and is probably the name of the tribe displaced by the Purakapale people in the past. It is Arakitamun-uwi (plural), Arakitamun-ini (masculine), Arakitamun-inga (feminine). 101

Horde Places. Living in isolated groups, these people talk of horde places. A man from the south of Bathurst Island will tell you he is of the Tikaluwila people, in the horde place of Tikalaru, the country. Thus a man is a Tikaluwinala and a woman is a Tikiluwinila of the country of Tikalaru in the tribe of Worunguwi. (Hart writes Tiklauila). 621 361

As it is with this horde so it is with all the groups, three of which are on Bathurst Island; Tikalaru on the south of the Island, Arangu on the north, and Malo on the western shore of the Island. We are not sure of the Melville Island divisions but the following are fairly reliable: Mundiimpu, Anangatera, Yaimpi, being three hordes united as one horde on the southern shore; Turupu and Maruwu, two hordes living as one horde to the north-east of the Island; and Wilarunggu and Munaipu, two hordes living as one local group on the north-west of the Island. (This does not conflict with Hart's list.)

These hordes have indefinite tribal boundaries, yet it is considered a transgression to go too far into them for hunting purposes. One law relating to food gathering is, "He who burns the grass first is considered to own all the food that is caught on that burnt patch; he is a boss as it were and remains such until after the cold weather sets in and the dews bring on a new lot of grass." 423 224

Clans. Although the people are divided into numerous hordes they have only three clans (*aramipi*), but each of these clans has a number of sub-totems, *emuya*.[1] These may be survivals of weaker clans or possibly an example of classificatory totemism. Hart calls the *aramipi*, phratries. The totems are: 614

1. Main totem	*Kudjarli*	Fire
Sub-totems	*Yarinapila*	Red ochre
	Iywati	Honey nest
	Pinkwarui	Stingray
	Ilitui	Tree with red flower
	Woriapula	Sun
2. Main totem	*Tukambani*	Martin
Sub-totems	*Tapitapini*	March fly
	Buygaluwila	Stone
	Ariyguwila	Stone.
3. Main totem	*Miatui*	Pandanus
Sub-totems	*Murukpungama*	Flying fox
	Mudumbila	Mullet
	Mandupowi	Fly
	Andolui	Spring
	Tjilati	Jabaru.

[1] The same name as the gall-bladder and the pulse.

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Each of these *emuga*, sometimes called Pukui (sun),[1] has a number of cult centres and in them resides the "old woman" of the clan; these are also called *emuga*. The sacred site of the Tukambani clan is at Morapeanga, Cape Keith; of the Miatui, Irapulanwa, Buchanan Island in the Apsley Straits; of the Kudjali, Padupi; Sanke Bay, or as the natives say in their quaint pidjin, Djenakaba, which is on the north of Melville Island, an old trepang site.

As far as could be ascertained, no fixed belief is associated with these clan centres. They are not burial caves invested with a ritual significance such as we find in parts of the mainland (Wadaman and other tribes), yet the shade or spirit of the dead does follow the track made by the natives as they come from the sacred centre to "show it the road." Only some natives know this. It is probably a ritual that has become lost with the advent of new ideas.

Clan Relationship. To marry within a major clan or phratry, *aramipi*, is taboo, *himigari*. A person of one phratry can only marry into the other two major clans. Thus, all Tukambani and their kindred sub-clans are mother, mother's brother, mother's mother, mother's mother's brother, sister's son and daughter, brother and sister. They call people in the other two clans father, father's sister, son, daughter, wife, wife's brother, wife's mother, wife's mother's brother, wife's mother's mother and wife's mother's brother. In other words, descent is matrilineal.

Marriage Law. The marriage law is the same as in most tribes: a man marries his mother's mother's brother's daughter's daughter or, as the natives would say, "a man marries his group sister's son's daughter." They have equal exchange in marriage, that is "opposite brothers exchange sisters." An "uncle" (mother's brother) takes his (group) nephew's daughter, and the group nephew receives the uncle's daughter in exchange (cross-cousin type). There are neither subsections nor sections and indeed, no moieties. A reason may be suggested for this: being isolated on the island, each person knew his or her relationship to the others, and as there was no intertribal exchange, the need for this type of classification never arose. One of the important functions of the section and subsection systems is to facilitate intercourse between tribal groups.

The marriage system with relationship terms is explained in the following table:

		1	2	
A	.. *ubunga* m.m.m.m. or sr.	*UWANI* M.M.M.M.B. or B. (Ego)	*yarbunaiya* w.	*YANUMINI* W.B.
B	.. *yamoriy* m.m.m.	*YARMURDI* M.M.M.B.	*umbreniwa* w.m.	*YAPINAWINI* W.M.B.
C	.. *imaninga* m.m.	*IMANANI* M.M.B.	*tumaliya* w.m.m.	*TAMALITI* W.M.M.B.
D	.. *inari* m.	*ILAMANI* M.B.	*umarani* w.m.m.m.	*IMERANINGA* W.M.M.M.B.
A	.. *ubunga* sr.	*UWANE* B.	*yabunaiya* w.	*YANUMINI* W.B.

[1] These natives have numerous names for the same object, the result of the taboo on certain words after a death.

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All those in number one group belong to the same clan, and are "opposite" to those of number two group, who also belong to one clan. The lines A, B, C and D are intermarrying groups, i.e. Ego marries his *yubunaiya*, etc.

Of course, relationship terms also include others denoting the type of relation or blood tie. For instance, a mother's brother or a sister's son (group) when distantly related to Ego could be his father-in-law and would then be called *YUNARENIWA*. A true father is *ERINGANI*, a father's sister, *yananiya*; father's father *ARMINI*; father's mother, *arnma*; mother's brother's own daughter, *yamuina*, and one son, *YAMUWANINI*[4]; half brother is *INGULABINI* and a half-sister *inguleba*.[5]

This system of marriage is not unlike the Murngin and Anula system and also is the same as the *wadji wadji* (wrong side marriage) of the Mudbara. In one, cross-cousins—not *inguleba*—can marry, while in the true Mudbara cross-cousin marriage is prohibited.

Rites. The rituals centre around the Kulama. The underlying principle of this is to ensure that the Kulama (a small hot yam that embodies the spirit of the "old woman" and guardian of the horde) is cooked correctly, for this ensures her protection against Maradji, the rainbow snake, another old woman who can cause evil to come upon them and "swallow them" up. It is performed during the wet season by each family, and is said to bring about a plentiful supply of food. The Kulama is also used to pass the initiates, both male and female, from a lower to a higher order in the social scale, although I myself could not see that any important results were obtained by the initiates through the ritual.[6]

Some result, or at least protection, however, is obtained: if the Kulama is not sung or danced at the prescribed time or place, the Marakarti (spear grass) and also the ring used for cooking the Kulama yams at the ritual, would give rise to a poison, *Tani*, which would pass into the air and cause sickness; perhaps a youth who had not passed through the Kulama would sicken and die. On the other hand, a youth who has passed through the ritual may gain a certain satisfaction by believing that he can drive the sickness away and protect the family. In addition, the Kulama is not only an increase ritual for yams; in it the father also "sings" the name of his child in a form of song, *apa*, and foretells in a dream that a certain spirit "shade" will be incarnated through one of his wives at some future date; for these children are waiting at that "spirit dreaming" place called Bilawuwi. In other words, it is a human increase ritual.

[4] These are true cousins and cannot marry.

[5] This *inguleba* native is the term for persons who are taboo to Ego; they cannot approach Ego's wives, as their sweat must not touch. They are people who are "out of line" in relationship. For instance, if a Kudjarli man marries two women, one a Tukambani and the other a Mintini, his children would be of two different *pukui* or totems. These children, half-brothers and half-sisters, are *inguleba* to each other.

[6] It is unlike the Karawadi of the subincised people, in which the initiate is freed of certain food taboos, and again in the Kudidjingara, through which the old men receive magical power to levy tribute from the young people of the tribe, who have not passed through that ritual.

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An interesting thing in the Kulama is that at that ritual a man must not touch his wives or children, because a deadly sweat called *kilawini* comes from his body and will cause any of his nearest who touch it to die.[7]

Another small ritual is the Miringaleta, a puberty custom for girls; it is connected with the Rainbow snake and is also a marriage ceremony. Last of all comes the Pukamaane, a death ritual, the purpose of which is to "lay the shade," *eninkerr* of the deceased person and send it back to its clan centre from its wandering around the bush in an endless "walkabout."[8] The "shade" is said to leave the body after a period when the joints begin to crack (the natives call this *Yatarahs*); it then immediately hurries to the various camps, emitting a strange cry, "oom—oom." By this sound—the cry of a night bird—the natives know a person has died.

Culture Heroes. They have culture heroes: Purakapale and with him are the "dream time" heroes, Mudarti (the Kurakun of the subincized people), the wedge-tailed hawk, and numerous others all linked together in the legends of long ago; Kuparani, the frill necked lizard and his sister Ikaikgini, the black cockatoo, are characters in the incest tales.

There are also heroes who produced things and turned into animal form, Irakapa, the alligator, the maker and "boss" of the ceremonial spear—*Tumereka*. Rokama, the mosquito, the headman of the ordinary mangrove spear (*Orati*) which is used for everyday work. In making this he copied the speargrass, *Marakarti*.

The Present Day Spirits. Some spirits vitally affect their present lives. Papinowari, or Lamparapari, the destroyer—expressing in a milder form the *Kadaitja* theory of the central natives. Kala is also an ordinary spirit, in fact a shade of a departed native of prowess in the past, who is on the "walkabout." Barminuar is a quaint elusive spirit—an island Peter Pan—who never grows old, and is about the size of a small boy. He is always up to mischief; many tales are recounted of natives meeting with him and always finding him "too clever." In one place they showed me a tree where such a spirit had entered, not through a hole in the trunk, but had just passed through it, splitting it open; the split is there now.[9] The rain spirit is Pakadringa. The lightning is caused by his wife Bumarali, whose axe splits the trees. His other wife, Tomakaka, is the monsoon and when it begins the natives know it is she by the sighs (the hiss of the wind in those rains).

Magic. Their magic is somewhat the same as in other tribes. The idea differs slightly in that with them the aim is to bring the destroyer, Lamparapari, upon the victim. This is done by burning a piece of blood—a hard piece which has dried up—and letting the wind carry the smell to the victim. The latter becomes affected because Lamparapari is attracted by this smell and sucks out his blood.

[7] The name for ordinary sweat is *kulampara*. It is interesting to compare the Anula belief; if a person is sung with magic, a white exudation appears on the skin, with deadly effect.

[8] These people have no idea of reincarnation; in their view, a spirit is eternal but is never reborn.

[9] Trees often burst like this owing to being hollow and full of water or dirt, the pressure of which bursts them open. This could have given rise to the story.

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Sickness is cured by beating the ground around the victim to hunt the evil spirit away. Likewise, a song, Upripu, is sung by the wives of the sick man to make him better. The *Kuwuwa*, a pointed bone, or sometimes a tomahawk is used to stab a person's urine or an article his body has touched (e.g. a bark he has lain upon to sleep) and so cause him to die. Blood thrown into the sea will cause a violent wind and a big tide. The Kulama rite will bring about the same result. No instance has been found of magic being used to entice the spirit from a person's body, yet if a person failed to show sympathy for the dead, the dead person's "shade" would cause that person to die and then run away with his "shade." To mention the name of the newly dead is taboo. If a person accidentally does this he must immediately hit his mouth and spit to cleanse it of the evil.

Names. The names given to the women and men are of three types; the first is the actual name and is given to a person at the Kulama rite; this is an ordinary word such as "honey nest," etc., but it is always in a different language from the ordinary one which is used everyday. The child also receives the name of his father, father's brother or father's sister; this is a traditional name. Then, in the case of a male, come the terms denoting his initiation grade in the Kulama. First stage—*Murakmani*; second stage—*Wadjaneta*; third stage—*Migingariiya*=first song and *Midjintera*=second song; fourth stage—*Mekeartirima*=third song; and finally, *Mahagala*, which denotes that the man is qualified to conduct a Kulama. Likewise, both sexes have grade names denoting their status in the Pukamane death ritual. Male terms: first stage—*waniati*; second stage—*warunerera*; third stage—*wanerteriima*; fourth stage—*wanderara*. With girls and women these names are the same except for the ending denoting the sex.

In the case of women there are terms denoting age or condition. *Kudjine*—child; *alinga*—girl; *miriyaleta*—puberty; *murogarbra*—breasts developed; *piramuruka*—first sign of pregnancy; *paprungala*—pregnant woman; *wanantaka*—woman who has a child dead, and *umparu*—widow. Other terms are *pitukwen*—widower; *meniuggini* and *padrubayga*—boy and girl respectively, whose mother is pregnant; *indjula*—a woman whose breasts have fallen; and as on the mainland, a mother is always called by the sex of the child she carries in her arms: *oriowri* if a boy, *kudjine* if a girl.

Language. The language is peculiar. In many instances, owing to the masculine and feminine endings of the words, the women seem to speak a different language to the men. In addition, another language, or set of words, which is very rarely spoken, seems to obtrude itself. Thus one article will have many names. This is brought about by the strong death-taboo on names; as soon as a native dies, his names and his son's names are taboo and others are substituted. In this way every year new words are coined. Only recently at a Kulama two new ones appeared as a consequence of this taboo. *Purinteriya*, new name for tree, and *alepwa*, new name for coconut. Or a Kulama name may be given as, say, *wilinkurawa*, the meaning of which will be given as honey nest; and yet numerous words for honey are nothing

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like this word. They also have a strange way of twisting words; for example Port Darwin is called *Pudarnap*.

The Future. The people themselves are—in Mr. Harney's opinion—mentally lazy, and hold a curious mixture of mission and native teaching. Although Christians—Roman Catholics—believing in God, they have a fixed dread of *Marattja*, the rainbow serpent. The good that the mission would do is limited by two facts, in spite of the sincere labours of the missionaries: (1) there is no fixed progressive policy with regard to material advancement. The missions are not self-supporting, probably owing to the poor quality of the soil around that part. (2) The younger natives have too easy an entrance into Darwin. They reach it by short stages with canoe from Melville Island. Moreover, their presence in the town is always welcome and encouraged, because it means cheap labour for the white people. Unfortunately, it is the beginning of the end for the native.

One thing is urgently required if they are to be saved: (1) complete control forcing them to stay on their Islands; these provide plenty of native food. And (2) subsidizing of the mission to do "controlled work" in line with government policy. Apart from that, but only if necessary, a station, such as at Garden Point, could be opened and attention given to the medical and other needs of the islanders, in particular, of the aged and sick.

W. E. HARNEY.
A. P. ELKIN.